IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend claims 1-19, and add new claim 20, as shown in the complete list of claims that is presented below.

1.   (currently amended) An ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus comprising:

an image acquisition component which acquires input image data <u>from a printed medium</u> in which ~~additional~~image information is embedded;

an extracting component which extracts the ~~additional~~image information from the input image data; and

an ~~additional~~image information modification component which generates new ~~additional~~image information by modifying the ~~additional~~image information when ~~determining that~~ the ~~additional~~image information complies with a predetermined condition, and generates copied image data by embedding the new ~~additional~~image information into ~~the input image data or~~ image data obtained by removing the ~~additional~~image information from the input image data.

2.   (currently amended) The ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein:

said ~~additional~~image information contains copy control information for limiting an allowable number of times the input image data is copied; and

when determining that the copy control information contains a variable value representing permission to copy the input image data, said ~~additional~~image information modification component generates the new ~~additional~~image information by modifying the variable value and generates the copied image data.

3.   (currently amended) The ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus according to Claim 2, wherein said ~~additional~~image information modification component

determines that the copy control information contains the variable value representing permission to copy the input image data when the variable value is within a predetermined range.

4.   (currently amended)   The ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus according to Claim 2, wherein said ~~additional~~image information modification component modifies the variable value by a smaller amount with a higher level of access authorization of a user, and modifies the variable value by a larger amount with a lower level of the access authorization level of a user.

5.   (currently amended)   The ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus according to Claim 2, further comprising a recording component which stores the ~~additional~~image information extracted by said extracting component, wherein:

when determining that the ~~additional~~image information contains a flag value representing image data of an original file and the same ~~additional~~image information is not stored in said recording component, said ~~additional~~image information modification component generates the new ~~additional~~image information to write the generated new ~~additional~~image information into the recording component and generates the copied image data;

when determining that the ~~additional~~image information contains a flag value representing the image data of an original file and that the same ~~additional~~image information is stored in said recording component, said ~~additional~~image information modification component modifies the variable value that is contained within the ~~additional~~image information stored in said recording component, and generates the new ~~additional~~image information and the copied image data; and

when determining that the ~~additional~~image information contains a flag value not representing the image data of an original file, said ~~additional~~image information modification component does not generate the copied image data.

6.   (currently amended)   The ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein, when determining that the ~~additional~~image information contains a flag value representing image data of an original file, said ~~additional~~image information modification component generates the new ~~additional~~image information by changing the flag value to a value not representing image data of an original file, and generates the copied image data.

7.   (currently amended)   The ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein, when determining that a level of access authorization of a user is equal to or larger than a predetermined level, said ~~additional~~image information modification component can provide the copied image data having the same ~~additional~~image information as that of the input image data, without generating the new ~~additional~~image information.

8.   (currently amended)   The ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said ~~additional~~image information modification component generates the new ~~additional~~image information by adding personal identification information of a user to the ~~additional~~image information.

9.   (currently amended)   The ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said ~~additional~~image information modification component generates the new ~~additional~~image information by adding identification information of a system to the ~~additional~~image information, and said ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus is integrated in said system.

10.   (currently amended)   An ~~additional~~image information processing system comprising:
        an ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus according to Claim 1;
        a scanner which obtains the input image data by optically scanning a printed medium in which the ~~additional~~image information is embedded; and

a printer which prints out the copied image data.

11 (currently amended): The ~~additional~~image information processing system according to Claim 10, further comprising a data receiving unit which receives image data transmitted through a communication line and provides the received image data to the image acquisition component.

12.   (currently amended)   The ~~additional~~image information processing system according to Claim 10, further comprising a data sending unit which sends the copied image data to said communication line.

13.   (currently amended)   The ~~additional~~image information processing system according to Claim 10, further comprising a display unit which displays one or both of the ~~additional~~image information extracted by said extracting component and the new ~~additional~~image information.

14.   (currently amended): ~~An additional~~The image information processing system comprising:
        an ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus according to Claim 8; and
        an information reading unit which reads personal identification information from a recording medium storing the personal identification information of a user, and provides the read personal identification information to said ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus.

15.   (currently amended)   ~~An additional~~The image information processing system comprising:
        an ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus according to Claim 4; and
        an information reading unit which reads access authorization from a recording medium storing the access authorization of a user, and provides the read access authorization to said ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus.

16. (currently amended) An ~~additional~~image information processing method comprising the steps of:

(a) acquiring input image data from a printed medium in which ~~additional~~image information is embedded;

(b) extracting the ~~additional~~image information from the input image data;

(c) determining whether or not the extracted ~~additional~~image information complies with a predetermined condition; and

(d) generating new ~~additional~~image information by modifying the ~~additional~~image information when it is determined ~~in said step (c)~~ that the ~~additional~~image information complies with said predetermined condition, and generating copied image data by embedding the new ~~additional~~image information into ~~the input image data or~~ image data obtained by removing the ~~additional~~image information from the input image data.

17. (currently amended) The ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus according to Claim 3, wherein said ~~additional~~image information modification component modifies the variable value by a smaller amount with a higher level of access authorization of a user, and modifies the variable value by a larger amount with a lower level of the access authorization level of a user.

18. (currently amended) The ~~additional~~image information processing system according to Claim 11, further comprising a data sending unit which sends the copied image data to said communication line.

19. (currently amended) An ~~additional~~image information processing system comprising:

an ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus according to Claim 7; and

an information reading unit which reads access authorization from a recording medium storing the access authorization of a user, and provides the read access authorization to said ~~additional~~image information processing apparatus.

20.   (new) The image information processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein the new image information is embedded to the printed medium as a background pattern.